



U.S. Department of Justice

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PRESS RELEASE

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District Man Ordered to Forfeit More Than \$6 Million For Operating an Unlicensed Money Transmitting Business

WASHINGTON - Tekle Tewolde, owner of Who U Wit Entertainment, Inc., was ordered today to forfeit to the United States a criminal money judgment of \$6.35 million for operating an unlicensed money transmitting business, announced U.S. Attorney Ronald C. Machen Jr. and Rebecca A. Sparkman, Special Agent in Charge of the Washington, D.C. Field Office of the Internal Revenue Service-Criminal Investigation.

Tewolde, 45, of Washington, D.C., pled guilty in January 2011 in the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia. He was sentenced today by the Honorable John D. Bates. In addition to the \$6.35 million, Judge Bates ordered Tewolde to forfeit \$98,050 in funds recovered during the execution of a search warrant on Tewolde's premises and two seizure warrants on bank accounts controlled by Tewolde. The judge also ordered Tewolde to perform 100 hours of community service and placed him on 36 months of probation.

An unlicensed money transmitting business, broadly defined, is a business involved in the transfer of money or funds affecting interstate or foreign commerce in any manner, which is either operated without an appropriate money transmitting license from the District of Columbia or without complying with federal money transmitting business registration requirements. Tewolde did not register himself or Who U Wit Entertainment, Inc. as a licensed money transmitter pursuant to the laws of the District of Columbia or federal law.

According to the Statement of Facts proffered during the plea hearing, Who U Wit Entertainment was incorporated in 2001 as a business that promoted bands and music. However, it took on other missions. From January 1, 2008 through April 16, 2010, Tewolde received funds from individuals living in the United States in the form of cash, checks, or wire transfers. He pooled together those funds and deposited them into the bank accounts that he controlled. He then transferred those funds to individuals and entities outside the United States in order to ultimately transfer funds and/or goods to individuals or entities in Ethiopia and elsewhere.

Tewolde used multiple bank accounts held in the name of Who U Wit Entertainment, Inc., to transfer money outside the United States. Approximately \$6.4 million was deposited into Who U Wit Entertainment's bank accounts in the District of Columbia. Shortly thereafter, Tewolde transferred by wire a total of more than \$6 million outside of the United States, including to individuals or entities in China, United Arab Emirates, Turkey, Egypt, India, and the Netherlands. Some of the receiving entities were money exchanges in which funds were converted from U.S. dollars to other currencies. Funds were then transferred from these individuals and/or entities ultimately to individuals in Ethiopia.

Tewolde worked with other individuals in Ethiopia to facilitate the transfer of funds and/or goods from senders in the United States to recipients in Ethiopia.

In announcing the sentence, U.S. Attorney Machen and Special Agent in Charge Sparkman commended Special Agent John Dewire, of IRS-Criminal Investigation, who investigated the case, and Senior Contract Paralegal Taryn McLaughlin in the U.S. Attorney's Office's Asset Forfeiture and Money Laundering Section. They also cited the work of Assistant U.S. Attorney Diane Lucas, of the Asset Forfeiture and Money Laundering Section, who prosecuted the case.

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